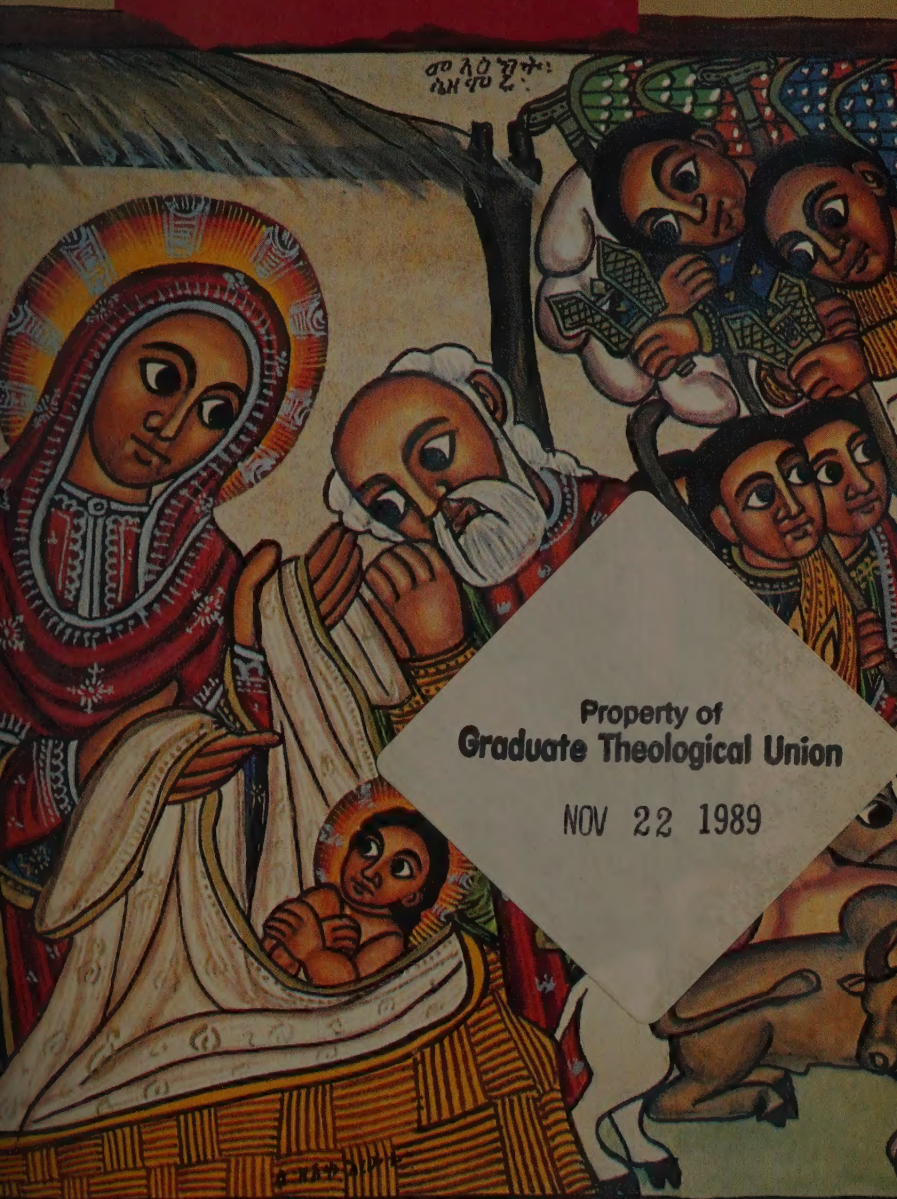


# LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

DECEMBER  
1989



Property of  
Graduate Theological Union

NOV 22 1989

Wholeness of the Church

## FEATURES

A Vision of Wholeness for the Church

*Herbert W. Chilstrom* .....

What Lies within That Manger Bare?

*Thomas E. Kadel* .....

Poetry in Season .....

The Stranger *Margaret Phalor Schrof* .....

Guidelines for Alternative Giving .....

Hungry for Hope *Robert E. A. Lee* .....

The Oversight *Jean L. Wenzel* .....

A Box Full of Love *Joan Wester Anderson* .....

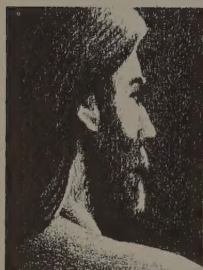
Toward a Renewed Community

*Joan Brown Campbell* .....

The Christmas Gift *Elisabet McHugh* .....

Miriam Johnson and Children's Stories

*Kathleen Lull Seaton* .....



## DEPARTMENTS

Contributors .....

Shorttakes .....

Bible Study: A Light to My Path—John .....

Selfcare: Winning at Losing .....

Women of the ELCA: Meet Two Companions .....

Letters, Call for Nominations,

Women of the ELCA .....

Meditation: Discovering Gifts .....

Lutheran Woman Today (ISSN 0896-209X), a monthly magazine for all women, is developed by Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and published by Augsburg Fortress, 4 S. Fifth St., Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440. Lutheran Woman Today editorial offices are at 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631.

Copyright © 1989 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved. Duplication in whole or in part in any form is prohibited without written permission from the publisher. Printed in U.S.A.

Second class postage paid at Minneapolis, MN, and additional mailing offices. Annual subscriptions: group rate, \$6.00 (regular or big print edition); individual \$8.00 (regular or big print edition); outside North America add \$5.00 for postage. Single copies, \$1.00. Braille edition available free; audiotape edition, \$18.00 (\$8.00 if visually impaired). Payable in U.S. funds. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Lutheran Woman Today Circulation, Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440-1209.



## CONTRIBUTORS

---

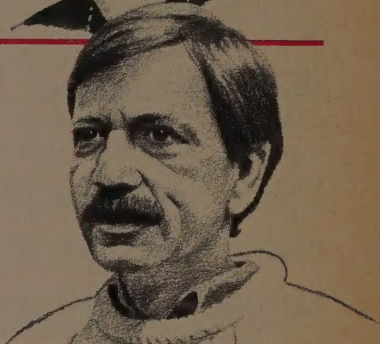
**Rev. Herbert W. Chilstrom**, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ("A Vision of Wholeness for the Church," p. 2), is no stranger to the contributions of women in the church, with six sisters actively involved in their respective women's organizations. A skilled photographer, Bishop Chilstrom also loves walking, gardening, and the quiet of his Pelican Rapids, Minnesota, lake home.

---



**Thomas E. Kadel** ("What Lies within that Manger Bare?" p. 4) is a family counselor and partner in the Center for Family Development, Spring House, Pennsylvania. A former parish pastor, he contributes frequently to Lutheran church periodicals and has written catechetical materials.

---



**Jan Brown Campbell**, New York City (toward a Renewed Community," p. 30), is the executive director of the U.S. Conference of the World Council of Churches, the first woman elected to this position. The Rev. Campbell, an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), has been actively involved in the ecumenical movement for over 20 years. She is the mother of three grown children and has four grandchildren.

---



**Cindy Mickelson** ("Meet Two Companions on Your Journey," p. 44). A native of Stillwater, Minnesota, and a recent graduate of Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota, she spent a year in England studying writing. Cindy is also an avid sportsperson and lover of music.

---



# A Vision of Wholeness for the Church

Herbert W. Chilstrom



I have a vision of the church. Diverse as the people of God are, I see the church as a family of believers linked in compassionate community—faithful to God and living out that faithfulness in the world.

It is a vision that gives me hope and energy as I travel about in the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and in the overseas churches I've been privileged to visit as bishop.

And the vision is more than a pretty picture that makes for nice description at Christmas. It is a picture that carries, in its lines, the very power of God—the power to bring about good for God's people and to spread the message of God's love to the whole world.

How does this power come to us? In one sense it comes to us "of old." "I chose you before I gave you life,"

God says to Jeremiah (1:5, Today's English Version)—and to us. As God confirms that call to each of us with the great love that sent Jesus to the cross to make us, once again, one with our Creator. But that power also comes to us anew as God places us in community—first in our Baptism, then in our daily faith life, saying to us, "Test out my love and see what you can do together, for I love all of you, even the whole world."

"Wholeness of the church" is what some people call this rich faith life. It is a faith life that seeks to express God's love and mission in relationship to others, respectful of each expression of the church as a valuable part of the community of faith. The Women of the ELCA have caught that vision well in their life together and in their many ministries. In their principles of organization, the Women of the ELCA state: "The community of women shall work toward wholeness of the church." How fitting that Lutheran Woman Today examines this principle at Christmas, for it undergirds so much of what we as a people of God are, and should be, about.



truth, God's people have been living out such a faith life for generations, and Scripture abounds with example after example of how people in community gain strength from one another as they seek to do God's will. Shiphrah and Puah, the two midwives who disobeyed the Egyptian king's order to kill all newborn Hebrew boys, knew what such strength was all about. So did Abraham and Sarah, who together ventured forth to answer God's call. (One wonders whether either of them would have gone to a new land alone, had they been so asked. But God, in His wisdom, called them both.)

So did Priscilla and Aquila, who in their joint ministry multiplied their effectiveness in spreading God's Word. So did the many other women who took an active role in the New Testament community of faith—disciples in their own right, though often unnamed in the Bible. So did the women in the early church who went out, two by two, to turn the world upside down. So did . . . (add an example of people you know from contemporary times).

Scripture abounds with example after example of how people in community gain strength from each other as they seek to do God's will.

My vision of the church sees God's people linking hands to praise their Creator, redeeming, sanctifying and serving. My vision of the church sees us living together—as a whole—the gifts of ministries that we might never have the courage, or strength,

or vision or money to do alone. In August of this year the ELCA met in churchwide assembly to bring our "community wisdom" to bear on the many ministries claiming our attention. I rejoice that God's Spirit led us to adopt some strong, faith-filled resolutions to guide us in our work together.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18, King James Version). It's not just individuals who perish, or give up, when they don't see what it is they can do and how they fit into God's plan. It's also the larger community—the church—that is at risk if there is no sense of call. At risk of missing—even worse, rejecting—those wonderful opportunities for mission, service and justice that God repeatedly puts before us.

I said earlier that I have a vision of the church. But there is more. I also have a vision for the church, for the ELCA at this moment in God's history. It's called Mission90, and many of you already know something about it. But I'd like to tell you more about Mission90 and the excit-

ing potential it can hold for all of us as a whole-church ministry. The editors of LWT have graciously offered me space in the January issue to do just that. In that issue, which also introduces LWT's emphasis for 1990, "The Integrity of Creation,"

I'll focus especially on the kinds of Mission90 emphases in which women are already active: Bible study and creation/stewardship-of-life concerns. In the call to work toward wholeness in the church, I am delighted to have Women of the ELCA as partners. ■

# WHAT LIES WITHIN THAT MANGER BARE?

Thomas E. Kadel

**Her wrinkled, wizened hand** tenderly stroked the cover of the old Bible before opening it. Her gesture was unconscious, yet revealing of her affection for this Bible which had been in her family for two generations before her birth.

It was the family tree she wanted to show me. Several different hands had recorded the generations of Maggie's family. "There I am!" she said, pointing to her name. "Here's my daughter. She died. You buried her, Pastor, remember? I wrote her name in here myself when she was just three days old. It was like she was official then!"

Later, I had opportunity to reflect upon the pleasant visit I had made to Maggie's house. An irony struck me. We had spent considerable time with her large Bible, but we never opened it past the family tree. I wondered at this. As a pastor, it seemed

to me that opening the Bible to a passage to be read should have at least occurred to me. But it didn't.

All our time with the Bible had been spent looking at the names and dates recorded there. Maggie had little story to tell about many of them. I recall thinking how quaint this was—an old Bible, a family tree and stories to tell.

I was much younger and quite a bit "smarter" then. I knew about things like how to properly interpret a passage of Scripture. I knew how to seek and find the gospel in the text. I knew large words like *exegesis* and *hermeneutics*.

I still know the large words and the processes of interpretation. Nonetheless, however, I find not quaintness, but deep meaning in an old woman's exclamation, "There I am!" Somehow I think Maggie was pointing not only to her name on a family tree, but through her name to the Scripture beneath. "There I am!"

Volumes of commentaries could not say more precisely the truth about what Scripture is than this: "There I am!"

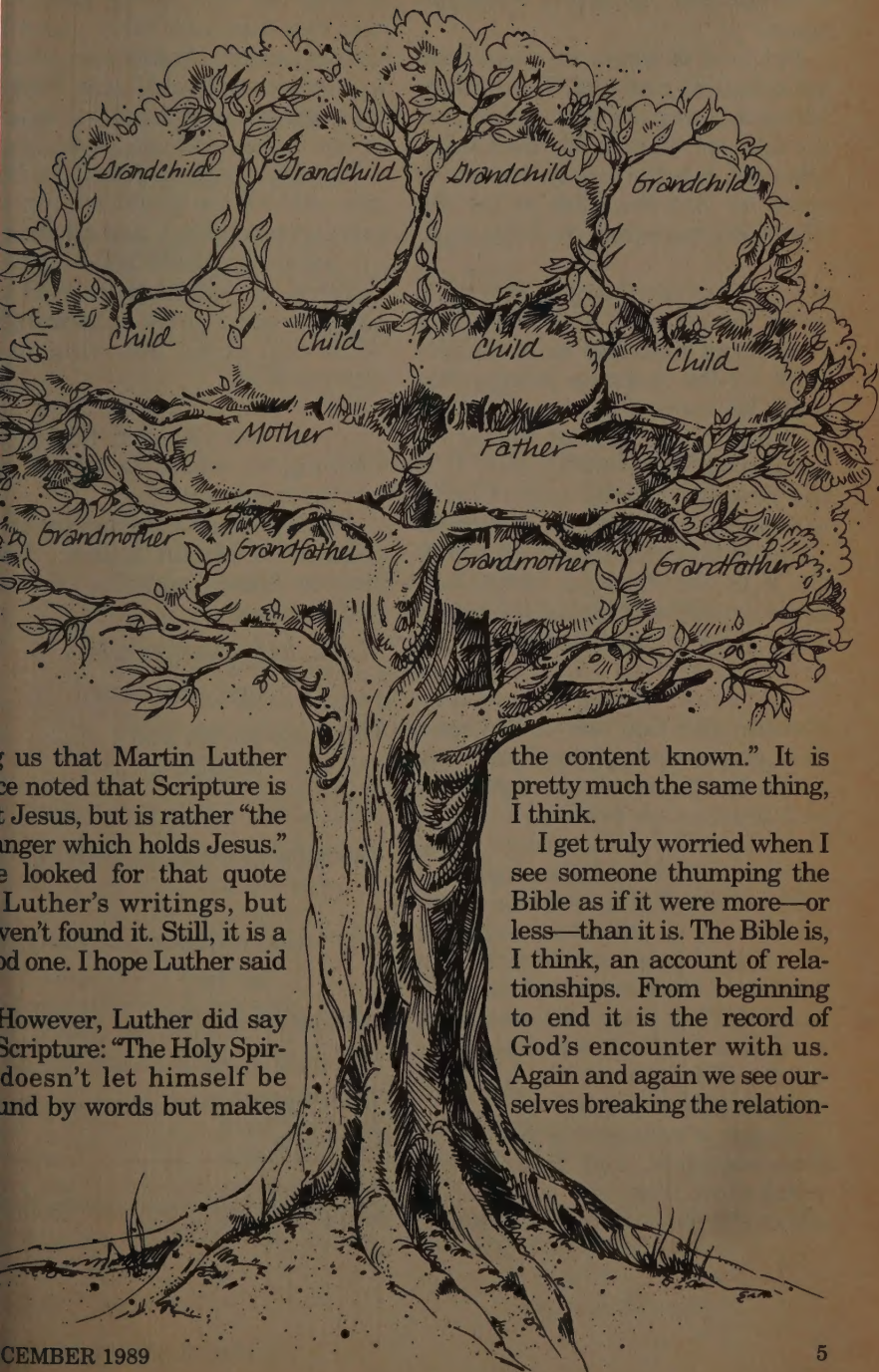
The second half of the truth would be, it seems, "There Jesus is!"

**The Bible gets a good workout** this time of year. Yet can all the readings and all the sermons and all the children's pageants ever say more about Scripture, or more about the meaning of Christmas, than "There I am" and "There Jesus is"?

I recall a seminary professor







us that Martin Luther  
ce noted that Scripture is  
t Jesus, but is rather "the  
anger which holds Jesus."  
e looked for that quote  
Luther's writings, but  
ven't found it. Still, it is a  
od one. I hope Luther said

However, Luther did say  
Scripture: "The Holy Spir-  
doesn't let himself be  
und by words but makes

the content known." It is  
pretty much the same thing,  
I think.

I get truly worried when I  
see someone thumping the  
Bible as if it were more—or  
less—than it is. The Bible is,  
I think, an account of rela-  
tionships. From beginning  
to end it is the record of  
God's encounter with us.  
Again and again we see our-  
selves breaking the relation-

ship and God restoring it. Again and again we see ourselves struggling to be our own god and God struggling to be our God. Again and again and again.

But here is where we sometimes get ourselves confused. The Bible is where the story of Christ is told. It is the manger which holds the Christ. Likewise, it is the family tree which holds us. But the Bible is not the Christ any more than the Bible is us.

**This is a distinction which warrants** some thought. Few of us would be satisfied with reading a book about marriage as a replacement for the marriage relationship itself. Yet some of us settle for reading about Christ without risking the living relationship with Christ. It is like viewing a Sunday school Christmas pageant without recalling that Christ really did come into our world. Or, it is like receiving Holy Communion without hearing the words “given for you” and “shed for you.”

**The Christian faith is a dynamic faith**, moving us into relationship with God and God’s Christ through the work of the living Holy Spirit. Scripture tells us that story and teaches us profound things about how God will continue to encounter us in this relationship.

But God will also continue to encounter us in other ways—in the eyes of the hungry and homeless, in the hearts of those treated unjustly, in the spirit of those who are moved by God to be God’s witnesses. The wonder of Scripture is that it tells us where and how to look.

Maggie is now several years gone from our midst, and I am several years gone from the community where she lived. I am sure, though,

that some grandchild or great grandchild still has that old Bible and still faithfully records new generations on that family tree. I am also sure that some other pastor has been shown the family tree and told a story or two about Maggie. Perhaps that family member still points to her or her name and says, “Here I am.”

At least, I hope so. For all the Maggies, and all the grandchildren and great-grandchildren and all the others whom we would know as God children are, indeed, there. And so Christ—our stories intermingle with and given meaning to by Christ’s story.

**We come to the manger and worship** the Christ it holds, even knowing we adore the Christ, and not the manger itself.

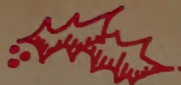
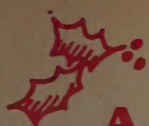
The beautiful Christmas hymn attributed to Martin Luther, “From Heaven Above,” contains two wonderful verses:

*“Look, look, dear friends,  
look over there!  
What lies within that  
manger bare?  
Who is that lovely little one?  
The baby Jesus, God’s dear Son.*

*Were earth a thousand times  
as fair  
And set with gold and jewels rare  
Still such a cradle would not do  
To rock a prince so great as you.”*  
Indeed. ■

Hymnal translation from *Lutheran Book of Worship* copyright © 1978.





## A Christmas Prayer

we again celebrate this joyful  
holy day we call Christmas,  
may we reflect on the wonder  
of Jesus' birth  
... and rejoice in the mystery.

May our hearts be softened and  
recreated by God's own hand,  
as we seek peace among nations,  
between neighbors, within  
families,  
... and in our own hearts.

May we care for those less fortunate,  
and share ourselves and our  
abundance with them—the  
homeless, the jobless, the hungry,  
the prisoners,  
... the poor and the weak.



May God's healing power touch  
those who mourn, those who  
suffer in mind, body, or  
spirit,  
... and all who carry heavy burdens.

May God's salvation come to those  
who do not yet claim Jesus as  
Savior. Like the shepherds,  
may we who hear proclaim  
the Good News that the  
Christ child of Christmas  
... still lives today!

Lord, quicken our hearts with  
your Holy Spirit, that we may  
know you personally, love you  
wholeheartedly, trust you  
implicitly, obey you joyfully,  
... and praise you unendingly!

*Iris Bents  
Palatine, Illinois*



## Was It Like This God, On the Day of Your Birth?

Those same angels who sing to you

“Holy Holy Holy”

You now hear with an infant’s petal ears.

And the eyes with which you know the world,

All-Seeing,

are now newborn eyes, trying to fix

on a blurred piece of straw.

You are everywhere,

Forever,

now packed in a doll-body that nearly disappears

in the embrace of a teenager.

Your strength tames the cosmos,

All-Powerful,

and now you can’t lift your head

from the warmth of your mother’s arms.

You know more than the universe holds,

Only True Creator,

but now, you’ve yet to discover your toes.

*Judith L. Roth  
Ventura, California*





## do you suppose Mary. . .

do you suppose Mary  
    longed for her mother  
        as she birthed . . .  
(hardly knowing Joseph,  
    that strangely gentle man)?

do you suppose Mary  
    wanted her mother to whisper and  
        soothe her cheek  
in that rough, dark stable?

i find myself, sometimes in a rough dark  
    (hardly knowing the gentle strangers),  
struggling to birth a new hopevision, and  
    i long  
        for a whisper and a  
soothed cheek.

God knows . . . God knows  
    shh . . . shhhh . . .  
        shh.

*Susan Kirlin-Hackett  
San Jose, California*

SONIA C. GROENEWOLD

### Brief Prayers on News Items

---

#### Committees focus on church staff support

---

The ELCA Division for Ministry urges each ELCA congregation to create a staff support committee. Such committees would focus on support and care for their church staff. They would help the staff and congregation develop mutual ministry.

*Lord, help congregations and staff members to support one another in proclaiming the gospel.*

---

#### LWF/WCC bring food—and hope

---

The city of Juba in Sudan has been kept alive, but barely, by regular Lutheran World Federation/World Council of Churches aid flights. Held by government troops and surrounded by the Sudan People's Liberation Army, the city has suffered from the country's ongoing civil war. Its population has swollen because of the large number of refugees fleeing the countryside in search of food and safety. The LWF/WCC had airlifted more than 10,000 tons of foodstuffs to Sudan by the first half of this year.

*Giver of life, continue to use us to feed those who are starving and to care for those in war-torn parts of the world.*

---

#### Brazilians help reestablish Lutheran church in Cuba

---

The Lutheran church in Brazil is sending pastors to help Cuban Lutherans. Lutherans in Cuba represent not more than 150 people—scattered and unorganized. They are trying to restructure, obtain legal status and recover their three places of worship, now being used for other purposes by the state.

*Bless, O Lord, the efforts of those who would restore the Lutheran church in Cuba.*

---

#### Lutheran college students meet at 'the arch'

---

Discussing Christian values, today's technology, society's attitudes and their faith, Lutheran college students are meeting December 28-January 1 in St. Louis. A part of the Lutheran group, the Lutheran Student Movement in the USA draws some 500 college students together during the holidays annually.

*Guide and direct these young people in their lives and ministries, God of love.*

Read or listen to the news daily and build a prayer list to be revised as needs change.

*Sonia C. Groenewold is news editor of The Lutheran.*



# The Stranger

Margaret Phalor Schrof

Dressed in blue jeans and a well-worn sweater, a young woman stood outside the kitchen as my family and I entered the multipurpose room of our church. We had come to a potluck dinner and children's Christmas program. I smiled, greeted her hesitantly, and learned that her name was Cathy.

Curiosity and courtesy led me to ask if she needed help. Without hesitation Cathy informed me that she was often looking for a free meal.

I moved to set places at a table for my family. "Was anyone going to invite Cathy to join them?" I wondered. Could I, a newer member, be criticized for asking this stranger to eat with the other families at the table?

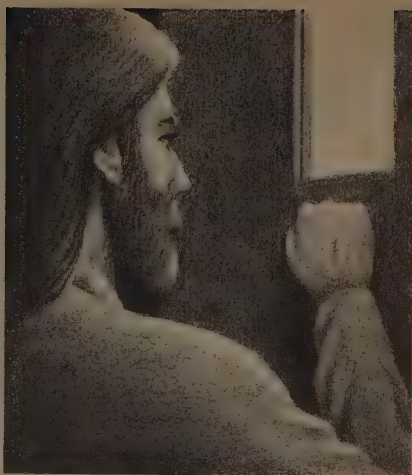
Although my invitation was not overly welcoming, Cathy joined us willingly. As our table conversation ebbed from flights to Europe to the use of our VCRs, I realized that all this was not a part of Cathy's experience. "God would have given me wings if he'd wanted me to fly," she told me. "Could our church assist her family with money?" was her concern.

"Contact our pastor," was my weak reply.

"Would anyone object to my taking home some food?" Cathy asked.

Feeling both awkward and guilty that I hadn't suggested it first, I searched for foil as she filled a plate.

Cathy then helped me gather cans from the tables. She went with



us into the sanctuary for the children's program. She sang with us, prayed with us, and welcomed the children's message.

Afterward, Cathy explained that she should be on her way since she had to walk home. I considered offering to drive her, but said nothing.

Although Cathy was given the times of our Sunday worship, I doubt if she returns. Why would she?

Yes, Lord, she was a stranger and we let her in. She was hungry and we did give her food. She was thirsty and we did give her drink. But did we welcome and accept her? Find out more about her life, her needs, her gifts?

She was a stranger in our midst, Lord—one of the least. Had it been you, Lord—would you have returned?

*Margaret Schrof is a member of First Lutheran in Fray, Ohio, and an experienced teacher and school counselor. Although "Cathy" is not the stranger's real name, this is a true story.*

# GUIDELINES FOR ALTERNATIVE GIVING

**G**iving is at the heart of Christmas! We remember God's great gift by giving to others. Given human nature and the commercialization of Christmas, "getting" sometimes seems more prominent than "giving," and giving to "our own" sometimes has more importance than giving to the one whose birthday we celebrate. It doesn't have to be that way. We can give in a way that honors the birth of Christ, expresses our love to our family and friends, and shows our concern for the earth.

Consider these *Dos* and *Don'ts* as you make up your own guidelines:

- **DON'T** look at catalogues or go to the malls to "get ideas" for what to give. That allows someone else to do your thinking for you.
- **DON'T** wait until the last minute when the commercial pressures are the greatest and you are most vulnerable.
- **DON'T** give any gift that doesn't reflect values you want to share. What does it say, for example, to give a war toy to a child?
- **DON'T** buy anything you can't pay for this December.
- **DO** consider the true interests and needs of the person to whom you are giving. Can your gift stimulate spiritual, mental or physical growth?
- **DO** give yourself. Your time and what you can make are probably the best gifts you can give.
- **DO** respect the environment in the gifts you select. For example, think twice before giving a gift made of

plastic or other nonbiodegradable materials.

- **DO** consider gifts from self-help craft groups where your purchase supports the preservation of traditional crafts and skills as well as the efforts of low-income people to become self-sufficient.
- **Finally, DO REMEMBER WHOSE BIRTHDAY IT IS!** When we celebrate a birthday, we give gifts to the person whose birthday it is. Is there any doubt as to what Jesus wants us to give him? He pointedly insists that in order to give to him we must find him in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned.

Gifts of our time, skills and money to support ministries to "the least of these" are the beginning points—no afterthoughts—of gift giving at Christmas.

**T**ake time to fill out the "Christmas Cost Analysis" form to see how much you spent for Christmas last year. Consider giving a "birthday gift"—in time and money—an amount equal to 25 percent of what you spent on last year's Christmas celebration. If there are others in your household, do the cost analysis as a group and make this covenant together.

**WARNING:** You probably do not have the time or money to do everything you have done before and add this "birthday gift." The birthday gift to Jesus should replace some of the time and money you would otherwise spend.



**Christmas Cost Analysis—**  
**How Much Did You Spend Last Christmas?**

**Gifts**

FAMILY:

Mother \_\_\_\_\_

Father \_\_\_\_\_

Son(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Daughter(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Brother(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Sister(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Grandmother(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Grandfather(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Grandchildren \_\_\_\_\_

Uncle(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Aunt(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Mother-in-law \_\_\_\_\_

Father-in-law \_\_\_\_\_

Brother-in-law \_\_\_\_\_

Sister-in-law \_\_\_\_\_

Nieces \_\_\_\_\_

Nephews \_\_\_\_\_

Others \_\_\_\_\_

**Sub-Total** \_\_\_\_\_

OTHERS:

Friends \_\_\_\_\_

Boss \_\_\_\_\_

Dog, Cat, etc. \_\_\_\_\_

Others \_\_\_\_\_

**Sub-Total** \_\_\_\_\_

**Decorations**

Tree \_\_\_\_\_

Ornaments \_\_\_\_\_

Decorations \_\_\_\_\_

Wrapping Paper \_\_\_\_\_

Ribbon, tape \_\_\_\_\_

**Sub-Total** \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Christmas Cards**

Cards \_\_\_\_\_

Postage \_\_\_\_\_

**Sub-Total** \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Food**

Christmas Dinner \_\_\_\_\_

Candy \_\_\_\_\_

Cookies, etc. \_\_\_\_\_

Special Meals \_\_\_\_\_

Beverages \_\_\_\_\_

**Sub-Total** \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Travel** \_\_\_\_\_

**6. New Clothes** \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Other** \_\_\_\_\_

**GRAND TOTAL** \_\_\_\_\_

Multiply "Grand Total" by 25%.

\_\_\_\_\_ X .25 = \_\_\_\_\_

This is how much money I plan to divert to social causes this Christmas.

This article and chart are from *Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?* published by Alternatives, P.O. Box 429, Ellenwood, Georgia, 30049, phone (404) 961-0102. A copy of *Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?* was distributed to ELCA congregations in the *Hunger Packet*.

# Hungry for HOPE

Robert E. A. Lee

**S**ome call it "compassion fatigue." Others identify it as a turnoff to the "bloated-belly syndrome."

We know what it is: We're tired of famine stories, those seemingly hopeless accounts in the media about third-world masses mentally numbed by malnutrition and perishing from starvation.

"Breakthrough on Hunger" is a television series that offers something different: a theme of hope woven through four Public Broadcasting System (PBS) one-hour television specials airing weekly beginning in February 1990. The series acknowledges that there are still massive and critical unsolved problems relating to the global food supply and delivery systems, but it focuses instead on the many and marvelous self-help projects under way in developing countries.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregations are among the tens of thousands, nationwide,



A *campesina*, peasant woman, addresses a community gathering of people who study agriculture, family health care, reading and writing their native language.

who will use the PBS series for consciousness-raising and for examining the ethical and spiritual dimensions of hunger issues. The ELCA is the way in organizing an interreligious coalition of over 20 Protestant, Catholic and Jewish agencies and denominations to:

- collaborate with the series producers so that the programs deal with





A classroom of CIMC, a women's educational program near Oruro, Bolivia, where women learn skills in agriculture, health and cultural history.

issues and values relevant to faith concerns; and  
prepare study materials (print and video) to enable discussion groups to get the most out of the programs.

The interreligious coalition, chaired by Faye Asquith of the LCA's Division for Congregational Life, is tailoring the study suggestions to groups of a dozen individuals or fewer, such as women's circles, adult forums or youth groups.

Rather than view the programs together, participants are urged to watch the broadcasts at home each week before gathering at church to discuss what they have seen.

Women's issues are very much alive in the "Breakthrough on Hunger" series:

In Bolivia, for instance, viewers see *campesinas* teaching themselves, and one another, in the quest for equality and better lives for their families. High in the Andes a woman moves from village to village organizing women to become better educated. There is hope in that.

In Bangladesh women have traditionally been excluded from access to banking services. Now the Grameen (Rural) Bank of Bangladesh

has developed innovations that allow women and other poor people to take out loans for small rural enterprises. This action alone enables thousands of families to move from charity to productivity. There is hope in that.

One of the "witnesses to change" featured in the series is Dr. Kamla Chowdry, former head of the National Wastelands Development Board of India. An economist, she played a key role in the Sukhomajri project that successfully countered soil erosion and transformed barren Himalayan foothills into productive farmland. There is hope in that.

Recent research in San Diego, California, and Madison, Wisconsin, revealed that television viewers tend to be skeptical about the media's treatment of the hunger issue. They assume they'll continue to get "sad stories" that leave them with a hopeless feeling.

"Breakthrough on Hunger" deals realistically with the real world and its problems and crises. But in place of a hopeless feeling, it offers a vision of what can be a more equitable and just world where people are enabled to untrap themselves. There's hope in that.



Members of the women's farm cooperative in Zimbabwe are shown in this scene from the PBS Series "Breakthrough on Hunger."

"We're not going to give you a nicely wrapped package tied with a bow," says senior producer Michael Camerini about the television series. "We are going to say, 'Here are some fragments, here are some reports from the front, here are a people who are struggling, each within their own

context, with these questions:

- What is development?
- Why are people hungry?
- Why are there poor countries?

"And we hope to give you vivid moments that help you think, that help you focus, that spark discussion."

From that might come the most important and hopeful breakthrough of all. ■

*Robert E. A. Lee, program consultant for the Interreligious Coalition for Breakthrough on Hunger, was formerly communications director for the Lutheran Council in the USA.*

## Preparing for

## Breakthrough on Hunger

**1.** To find out when "Breakthrough on Hunger" will air in your area, call your PBS affiliate.

**2.** Ask if your area PBS station plans to produce locally a fifth program of discussion and reaction. If not, perhaps a letter encouraging local follow-up is in order.

**3.** What group or groups in your congregation might be interested in pursuing this opportunity for study and action? Is this a ripe opportunity for an ecumenical group or a cluster event? Think creatively how—and by whom—this series and its related study materials might be most effectively used.

**4.** Select a group leader to facilitate the discussion. Make sure the leader has the study materials and videotape available to her or him.

**5.** Identify a person to initiate a promotional effort. Make sure that person is given the media kit to use.

**6.** Meditate on the biblical reflections (available in the study packet for distribution) prior to each program. Openly and prayerfully view the series allowing the Spirit to use this opportunity for hope and action.



# Breakthrough on Hunger

## Study Packet

ELCA congregations received a "Breakthrough on Hunger" brochure in the September issue of the *ELCA Action Packet* and the September *Hunger Packet*. In addition a study packet was distributed to ELCA congregations through the November 1989 *ELCA Action Packet*. The study packet includes:

- ▲ a leader booklet designed to elicit reactions to each telecast, to examine the implications of the broadcast, and to encourage reflection and subsequent action;
- ▲ four camera-ready flyers to duplicate and distribute, giving viewers a synopsis of each program and offering a related biblically based reflection to meditate upon;
- ▲ a media kit containing ad layouts, news releases and bulletin announcements to be used in promoting the series;
- ▲ a "Breakthrough on Hunger" poster.

A VHS videotape containing three-minute sequences from each program and clips to stimulate discussion is available separately.

To order these supplemental resources, write to Alternatives/Coalition, P.O. Box 429, 5236 Bouldercrest Road, Ellenwood, GA 30049. The VHS *videotape* of study helps is \$8.00 and the study packets are \$3.00 each (both prices include shipping). Enclose payment with order; make checks payable to Alternatives/Coalition. Note the quantity of each resource desired, the amount enclosed, and the name, address and phone number of the person who will receive the shipment.

For additional information, contact Faye Asquith, ELCA Division for Congregational Life, 1-800-638-3522, extension 2552.

# The OVERSIGHT

## A Short Story

Jean L. Wenzel

As Millie hurried to the door that cold December day to greet her nephew Tommy, her head was full of memories of a joyful, bright-eyed, child. Ten years had passed since she had seen that sprightly little boy. But the sight that greeted Millie as she opened the front door quickly did away with her quaint memories.

Tommy's eyes were concealed by black, stringy hair. Smoking a cigarette, he wore a T-shirt emblazoned with a phrase that left Millie struggling to maintain her composure. With some effort, she managed to embrace the boy and wish him a Merry Christmas.

"Please come and sit by the fire, Tommy," she said, gesturing toward a worn, comfortable-looking chair. "Do you remember the roaring fires Uncle George used to build?"

"You got somethin' to eat?" Tommy asked abruptly, not looking at his aunt. She raised a finger and indicated that supper would be ready soon.

Sharing the holiday with Tommy while his parents agonized over their imminent divorce would not be easy, Millie thought to herself as she set out a hearty meal. She soon called Tommy, and he fell to ravenous eating. The largely silent meal was punctuated only by Millie's failed attempts at conversation. Afterwards, Tommy seemed to sneer at the des-

sert plate of fancily decorated cookies. He quickly ate several, however, then settled himself in front of the fire again.

When Millie joined him, Tommy had his head cocked back slightly so that his hair fell away and revealed his eyes. They were the same eyes Millie recalled, but they appeared smaller and had lost the blue of a child's eyes and seemed a lusterless gray.

"Do you like to listen to Christmas music?" Millie asked timidly.

Tommy yawned. "Not much. Mom's got Conway Twitty singing Christmas stuff, that's all."

"Maybe one evening we could listen to George's records," Millie suggested. "All the finest of the old carols, some of the melodies over a thousand years old. Imagine!"

"Yeah." Tommy yawned again. "Think I'll go to bed."

Millie pointed her guest to his room, bid him good night, and returned to her place by the fire. She began searching through George's record collection for music which might restore her spirit. Not wanting to disturb Tommy, she rummaged for a pair of headphones and settled down to enjoy a selection of carols.

Delighted with what she heard, she eagerly took in the beauty of each



melody. The final carol, "Adeste Fideles," had been George's favorite. Millie felt uplifted during the triumphant refrain, but by the time the organ's final chord sounded, she began to cry, then sob—from the combination of the music's beauty, her grief over George's death, and the frustration brought on by her nephew's presence. Eventually she fell asleep, headphones askew, her nose bright red, handkerchief wadded tightly in her hand.

When she awoke, Tommy was standing over her, his eyes registering what seemed like concern.

"You all right, Aunt Millie?" he asked.

Millie retreated into the soft back of the chair.

"I'm fine, Tommy. I guess I fell asleep listening to the music. I'll get me breakfast."

"Yeah, I heard the music."

Millie turned to the stereo and saw at she hadn't adjusted the knob properly for the headphones. Her Christmas carols must have filled the entire house.

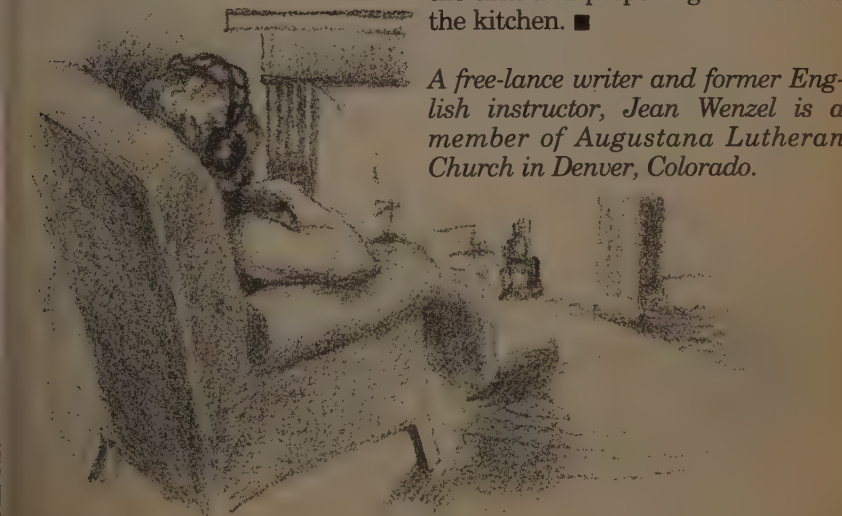


"Sorry if it kept you awake, Tommy. An oversight on my part," she said quietly, but she couldn't resist asking Tommy what he'd thought of the carols.

"I sat at the top of the stairs, listening," Tommy replied, his voice as bland as usual.

But Millie knew that in addition to listening to the music, Tommy had seen her grief, and she fancied that her nephew's eyes looked infinitesimally larger and brighter. Although she was far from certain what the holiday would bring, Tommy's visit was just beginning. She went to fix breakfast, this time enlisting her nephew's aid, yanking the boy up by the arm and propelling him toward the kitchen. ■

*A free-lance writer and former English instructor, Jean Wenzel is a member of Augustana Lutheran Church in Denver, Colorado.*



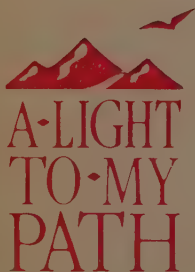
# The Light Shines in the Darkness

Study text: John 1:1-18 (19-34)

Nancy and Craig Koester

**A**DVENT is a season for music. As Christmas draws near, singers carol on street corners, in shopping malls, and in nursing homes. Choirs perform Handel's *Messiah* and other compositions, new and old, and records and cassettes that have been in storage since last January are brought out again to cheer the household. The music brings back memories and also stirs hope for the future.

Rich in memory and in hope, Advent hymns often convey their message in the language of the Bible. For example, stanza 1 of the hymn used for this session's closing worship, "Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying" (*LBW* 31) draws themes from Isaiah's call for Jerusalem to awake (Isaiah 40:9-10) and from Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish maidens (Matthew 25:1-13). Stanza 3 evokes the images of saints rejoicing in heaven and of new Jerusalem's gates of pearl, mentioned in Revelation 15:2-4 and 21:21-23. Such hymns remind us of Jesus' first coming and awaken our hopes for his second coming. Take a moment to recall your favorite Advent hymn. Tell the group why this hymn is meaningful to you.



## The Word of Life and Light

The gospel of John begins the story of Jesus with "hymn." John 1:1-18, often called the prolog of the gospel, is written in hymnic style with a rich array of images or illustrations. The prolog uses Old Testament ideas to tell the new story of Jesus Christ. The phrase "in the beginning" and references to light and darkness in 1:1-5 recall the creation story.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO  
JOHN

At the beginning was  
the Word and the Word  
was with God, and the  
Word was God.

News in the beginning with  
God; all things were made  
through him, and without  
him was not anything made.  
In him was life.

Genesis 1. The conclusion of John's prolog uses imagery of Moses and the Exodus. The old images give the new story of Jesus great depth and power, reaching out to people from many different backgrounds.

Read John 1:1-5. These verses create a rich and moving introduction to the gospel by repeating key terms like *word*. In the space provided, list the important words that are repeated.

Why do you think the evangelist repeats these words?

Λ ο γ ο ς

■ The Greek term for "word" is *logos*. In Jesus' time the Greeks understood the *logos* as a divine energy, while Jews associated it with the word of God mentioned in the Bible. By using the term *logos* and the well-known symbols of light and darkness, the gospel presented Jesus in ways that people from many cultural backgrounds could understand.

2 As the gospel unfolds, Jesus is also described in other ways. What is Jesus called in the following verses: 3:13; 8:12; 10:7,11; 11:25; 14:6; and 15:1? Which of these descriptions is most meaningful to you, and why? Which of these might most easily be understood by people with little or no exposure to Christianity?

3 Read John 1:1-5 and Genesis 1:1-5. What similarities do you find between these passages? Why do you think the gospel writer used ideas from Genesis to introduce Jesus?

4 Matthew's gospel begins by tracing Jesus' gene-



alogy back to Abraham (Matthew 1:1-17). Mark begins with John the Baptist's ministry (Mark 1:1-8). After a brief statement of purpose (Luke 1:1-4), Luke begins with the promise of John the Baptist's birth to his parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth (1:5-25). Only John begins by tracing the story of Jesus back to the creation of the world. What special contribution does John make to our understanding of Jesus?

**5** The term *life* in 1:4, as elsewhere in John's gospel, means life in relationship with God. Recall that last month we discussed the story of the raising of Lazarus, where Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (11:25). In your own experience, what does it mean to find life in Jesus?

**6** Read verse 5 again. The Greek word that is translated in the RSV as *overcome* can mean either "to seize" or "to understand" (like the English word *grasp*). So the verse can mean that "the darkness has not overcome" (or seized) the light (RSV); or that "the darkness has not understood" the light (as phrased in the New International Version of the Bible). What is the difference in meaning between these two translations?

**7** In John 1:4-5, the life that was in Jesus is presented as a light that continues to shine despite the darkness. How is this evident in your own experience or in the experience of others you know?



### A Witness to the Light

**8** Read John 1:6-8. Both John the Baptist and Jesus were from God. When John's gospel was written, there was a need to clarify the difference between John the Baptist and Jesus. How do verses 6-8 accomplish this?

9 Read John 1:19-21. These verses reveal the kinds of hopes people had in Jesus' time. Many expected the Christ to be a powerful king, like David. Others expected Elijah to return and reconcile parents and children, as promised in Malachi 4:5-6. Still others looked for "the prophet" like Moses who was foretold in Deuteronomy 34:10-12. But John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Why did John introduce Jesus this way? Why would John's words have surprised people who awaited someone like David, Elijah or Moses?

10 What do Christians today expect from Jesus in daily life? What do you expect? Have your expectations always been fulfilled, or have there been times when those expectations were not met? What can Christians learn from such experiences?

11 The word *advent* means "coming." During the season of Advent, the church anticipates the celebration of Jesus' birth and looks forward to his return. What do Christians today expect Jesus to do when he comes again? What comes to your mind when you say the words of the Nicene Creed: "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end"?

12 Read John 3:25-30. Here John the Baptist describes Jesus as a bridegroom and compares himself to the best man, or bridegroom's friend, at a wedding. What roles do the best man and maid of honor play at a wedding? Why is bridegroom's friend a good description of John the Baptist?

13 Why is *bridegroom* a good description for Jesus?

What did John the Baptist mean when he said, "he must increase, but I must decrease"? The Advent hymns "Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers" (LBW 25) and "Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying" (LBW 31) refer to Jesus as the bridegroom. How do these hymns help us prepare our hearts for Jesus' coming?

14

What do you think is the purpose of the Advent season? What does your congregation do to help fulfill this purpose? How does your family or household observe the Advent season? What does the season mean to you at this point in your life?



### The Light Came into the World

15

Read John 1:9-13. Verse 9 recounts Jesus' first advent into the world. In Session 1 (September), we said that the term *world* has two meanings in John's gospel. It can refer to the creation, which is good (17:24), but more often *world* refers to rebellion against God. How are both of these meanings used in John 1:10? How does John's insight that the world was in rebellion against God deepen our understanding of God's love and of Jesus' advent among us?

16

John 1:11 states that Jesus came to his own home, and his own people did not receive him. To what do the words "his own home" and "his own people" refer? Why would some people have refused to receive Jesus? (See 5:16-18; 6:41-42.) What can keep some people today from receiving Jesus?

17

How did you become a child of God? What would you say if a neighbor or friend asked you what it means to be born of God?





■ John 1:9-18 tells the story of Jesus not once, but twice. Verses 9-13 recount how the true light came into the world. Verse 14 begins the story again, by announcing how “the Word became flesh.” But now the perspective changes. Instead of speaking about “the world,” the text says that the Word “dwelt among us,” that “we have beheld his glory,” and that “we all received grace upon grace.”

8 John 1:1-13 used ideas from the creation story to convey the Word’s significance for the whole world. John 1:14-18 uses images from the history of Israel to tell what the Word meant for the new Christian community. To whom does the “we” refer in verses 14 and 18?

9 The root word *dwelt* in verse 14 means literally “to dwell in a tent.” The people of Israel worshiped in a tent in the wilderness of Moses. What is the connection between the tent and God’s glory in Exodus 40:34-38? How does this Old Testament story help us to understand John 1:14?

20 The words “full of grace and truth” in John 1:14 recall the proclamation in Exodus 34:6 that God is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in steadfast love and faithfulness.” According to Exodus 33:18-23, Moses was not permitted to see God’s face. How does this Old Testament story help us understand John 1:17-18?

21 How was the glory of God made known in the ministry of Jesus? Recall especially the man born blind in John 9 and the raising of Lazarus in John 11. What part of Jesus’ ministry reveals God’s glory most fully?

# 22

During the Advent season people prepare to give and receive gifts. What kinds of gifts did Christ bring, according to John 1:14-18? In what ways does Christ continue to give these gifts today? How do we prepare to receive such gifts?

## In Closing

Listen carefully as John 1:1-18 is read aloud. Observe a quiet moment for prayer and meditation on the renewal of Christ in our world and in our lives.

## Worship

Sing together the Advent hymn, "Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying" (LBW 31).

## Looking Ahead

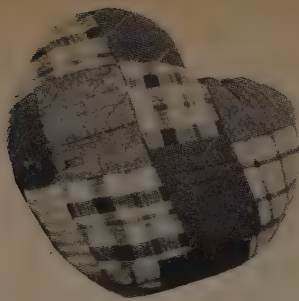
Next month will begin the first session in the 12-session Bible study for 1990, *Companions on Your Journey: Studies of Biblical Women*. January's session will focus on the book of Ruth and the commitment of Ruth and Naomi to God, their community, and each other. ■

© Copyright 1989 Augsburg Fortress. May not be reproduced without permission.

## Bible study resource book available on audiocassette

The Bible study resource book for *Companions on Your Journey: Studies of Biblical Women* is now available on audiotape through the ELCA Braille and Tape Service for persons with visual or other physical disabilities. The cost of the three-tape set is \$6 (payable by check or credit card), which includes postage and handling. Checks should be made payable to Augsburg Fortress. Orders may be directed to the Augsburg Fortress Audiovisual Department, 426 South Fifth Street, Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440.

# A Box Full of LOVE



an Wester Anderson

gnolia occasionally finds work picking cotton in the Mississippi delta to supplement the \$1000 annual welfare payment she receives for herself and her four children. Anderson's family of 11 lives in a tar-paper shack, without running water or electricity. Two of Melinda's daughters share a pair of socks.

Once a month, however, a package comes to each of them, a box filled with clothes, food, toys and best of all, hope. The box is sent from people who may never meet their "sister family" in Mississippi, but who care about them just the same.

You are there for us when we really need you," Melinda wrote recently to the retired Lutheran college professor who has been providing for them with extras through a unique organization called *The Box Project*. "I thank God for you."

The Box Project, begun 26 years ago, is a small, no-frills, nondenominational operation in Connecticut

that now assists more than 2500 families in Mississippi.

"Living conditions in the Delta area of Mississippi can rival the worst in third-world countries," says Harold Skillrud, bishop of the ELCA's Southeastern Synod, who recently toured the area. The 1800 families on the waiting list for the Box Project sponsors bolsters his claim.

Part-time and volunteer fieldworkers in poverty-stricken areas visit potential recipients to determine their need and utilize government help when available. A family's name is then forwarded to Nancy Normen, executive director of The Box Project, who, aided by a volunteer office staff, connects them with a family willing to help. At this point, except for occasional intervention when mishaps occur, the Box Project staff retreats into the background. "That's what makes the idea so appealing," explains Normen. "The

*The families deal  
one-to-one, without  
bureaucracies and red tape.*





## *The best part of the sharing is the letters.*



families deal one-to-one, without bureaucracies and red tape. Yet the Box Project allows some space between them too." And participants find it's satisfying to be able to provide the particular things a sister family needs.

Dr. Helen Strand of Cedar, Minnesota, agrees. After retiring from teaching at Luther College, she traveled to New Guinea as a missionary for the American Lutheran Church, then came home to enjoy the "quiet life." She heard about the Box Project through her women's group at Glen Cary Lutheran Church in Ham Lake, which was sponsoring an elderly Mississippi woman.

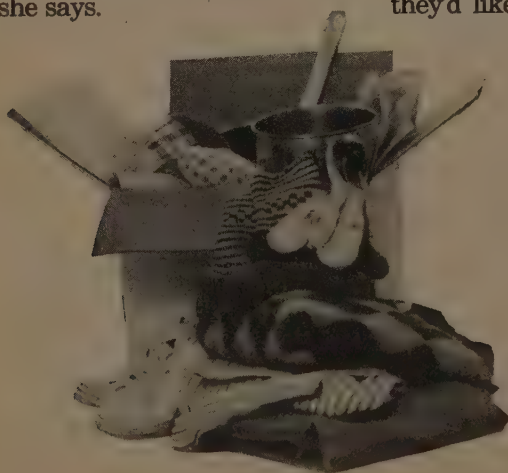
When the woman wrote the congregation that her daughter, Melinda, was expecting a child, Strand decided to visit some garage sales and collect a box of baby clothes. "For \$3.50, I put together a little wardrobe, and some of the church women donated cash for diapers and postage," she says.


"When Melinda received the box just after the birth, she was wild with joy. She had only one undershirt and a dozen diapers in which to clothe the baby, and the box made all the difference."

Helen Strand now enjoys perusing garage sales, sewing dresses for her "girls" and enjoying letters from the three families she now sponsors. "They're my foster children and grandchildren," she says simply. "We have added much to one another's lives, and we are all blessed."

Sometimes a sister family requests something specific—pots and pans, silverware or towels. Once a sponsor discovered that her family had room for a garden, but couldn't afford seeds, so she mailed enough to provide vegetables all summer long. Other boxes may include a winter supply of vitamins, postage stamps, paper and pencils and books.

When filling out an application, sponsors decide just how involved they'd like to be—a monthly or 1





*"Their spiritual faith is really remarkable. I often wonder just who is underprivileged."*

monthly carton to a family, a single parent or elderly couple; sharing a commitment with another sponsor; sending a Christmas box; or requesting to sponsor children of certain ages or clothing sizes.

Sponsors can specify the amount they'd like to spend each month. The average can run \$6 to \$8 and is included in the estimate. Members of The Box Project pay \$25 in annual dues to cover administrative costs and the five newsletters containing suggestions and feedback. Sister families annually contribute \$2 to a fund that covers special needs such as medication, moving costs, or material to patch a roof.

Some Lutheran churches in Florida, Connecticut, Minnesota and Wisconsin already participate in the Box Project as a group ministry. One of the most active and faithful congregations is Ladner Lutheran Church in Buffalo, South Dakota, whose women have sponsored the same Mississippi family since 1974. "One of our members read a short mention of the Box Project in a magazine," explains Florence Brengle, the group's correspondent, "and we decided to get involved. When you live on a ranch, at great distances from others, your opportunities to provide service seem limited. We wanted something we could do both singly and with the group; we also wanted to help someone directly, and build a personal relationship. What a wonderful experience it's been!"

Ladner churchwomen sponsor an elderly woman and a large family. To

help, they run a parishwide clothing drive twice a year, collect cash to help with fuel bills and at Christmas, and draw names for special gifts. They also "fill in with soap, toothpaste and items they can't buy with food stamps."

The best part of the sharing is the letters from Mississippi, Florence says, which are always read at meetings. "They're so touching and beautiful. Our family has tried so hard to better their lot, and have now been able to move into a decent house in town. Most of the children have stayed in school too."

For the Mississippi couple's 40th wedding anniversary last year, the Ladner women made an anniversary quilt, a poignant sign of the attachment everyone has for one another.

"Sometimes our letters of encouragement are what keep the Mississippi family going," says one sponsor. "On the other hand, their spiritual faith is really remarkable. I often wonder just who is underprivileged."

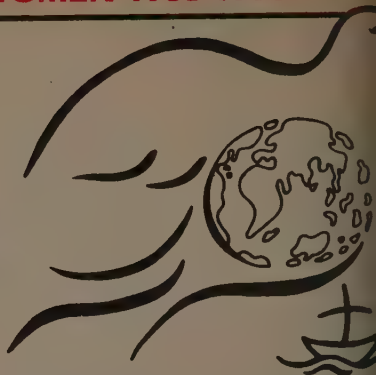
"Maybe the poor will always be with us," says another, "but if the quality of their daily life is a tiny bit better, then the Box Project is a blessing for all of us."

For more information about the Box Project send a self-addressed stamped envelope to The Box Project, Dept. L, P.O. Box 435, Plainville, CT 06062 or phone (203) 747-8182. ■

*Joan Wester Anderson, Arlington Heights, Illinois, is an author and lecturer on family life and parenting.*

# Toward a Renewed Community

Joan Brown Campbell



The day was crisp and cold, but the sun was shining as I prepared to fly to Boston. I felt both great anticipation and a strange sense of sadness.

Anticipation because I was on my way to join 8000 other witnesses at the historic ordination of Barbara Clementine Harris, the first woman to be called "Bishop" in the worldwide Anglican communion. Sadness because I knew that this victory had not been won without rancor and pain. But that day in Boston the voices of discontent were muted, and the church celebrated its courage, enthusiastically announcing to a watching world that the Episcopal Church in the United States was a "church in solidarity with women."

The ordination was an act of the whole church. Barbara Harris was ordained with its blessing, and however thorny the road ahead is to be, the church owned this decision.

The ordination of Barbara Harris as bishop is a quintessential example of what it means for churches to be "in solidarity with women." The power of this event lies in the fact that it was the church—old and young, male and female, Black and White, liberal and conservative—that claimed her as their bishop.

The ordination of Barbara Harris does not mean, however, that the gifts, callings and issues of women are given the attention and nurture needed—nor that equality in the church has been achieved. A visit to any congregation on Sunday morning will witness to the reality that is women who, in large measure, are the people of the churches, but it is the men, for the most part, who are the authority figures and make the decisions. The *Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women* (1988–1998) was born with the cry of women of faith to be taken seriously.

And although the Ecumenical Decade officially began with the Easter sunrise in 1988, the preparations for its advent have been long in coming. The struggle for women's dignity and equality is not new in churches. It is not a brash or trendy idea.

The World Council of Churches, which proposed the Decade, has prepared for this Decade since 1961 when the WCC heard a report from 58 countries on the role and status of women. At every WCC assembly thereafter, steps were taken to bring the world's churches closer to full recognition and appreciation of the gifts and ministries of women.



## The ECUMENICAL Decade: CHURCHES in SOLIDARITY with WOMEN

The Decade is *ecumenical* because the essence of ecumenism is to work toward the unity of humankind. The Decade is for *churches* as much as *women*, asking *churches* to be intentionally and openly involved in supporting women and their ministries. The Decade also calls for *churches* to demonstrate *solidarity* with women in a whole host of ways—from grass-roots levels to executive decisions—throughout the world, as each church feels moved by the Spirit.

The Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women is part of a broader vision that includes the renewal of our whole human community. It is a vision that transforms our relationships to one another and to creation, transformed into relationships of justice and caring, and sensitivity to one another's needs. As the Bible reminds us in Romans, all of creation is groaning for transformation.

## Global Effort

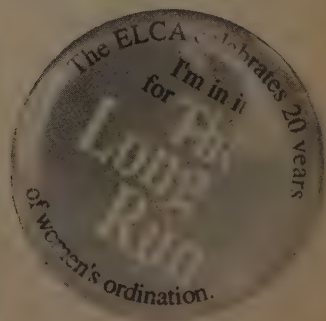
It calls us to live as sisters and brothers in a family structure that

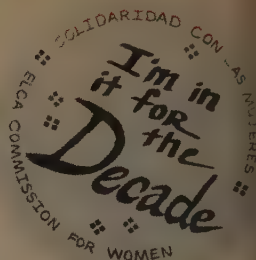
embraces the whole inhabited earth. For too long the struggle for women to take their rightful place in church and society has been thought of as a White, North American women's movement. Not so, for all women, around the globe, suffer from centuries of oppression and assumptions of inferiority. As the Decade comes alive around the world, we are beginning to hear stories that reveal the breadth and diversity of the struggle:

○ The National Council of Churches in Kenya will focus on basic needs (water, food, fuel and firewood) during the Decade.

○ The Decade committee in South Africa is challenging Christian women to acknowledge their unique role in the transformation of South African society. They write: "During these 10 years . . . we must rise from the position of servitude to that of service. God has bestowed upon us an inherent strength and resilience which we must now use to liberate the church."

○ In India, at the invitation of the Board of Theological Education, women are challenging the seminaries to admit women as full-time stu-





dents, as well as to recruit women and encourage seminaries to introduce a women's studies department.

○ Bishops in the Church of North India and in the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church are writing pastoral letters to encourage the participation of women in the church and to call attention to misteachings of the church.

○ Korean women theologians issued this statement: "We find the ultimate cause of our national division in the patriarchal culture of domination . . . we believe and hope that women and men will stand before God as partners in equality and harmony as we were created."

○ Philippine women are focusing on rural women, particularly the conditions of women workers on farms and plantations.

○ In Sweden the priorities for the Decade included inviting migrant women and refugee women to take part in the planning. Other issues to

be tackled are: violence against women, genetics and reproduction issues and the nomination of women to various church offices.

○ In Costa Rica, Indian Guaymí women traveled 18 hours just to take part in a Decade meeting. Children and men participated as well. Twelve male pastors cared for the children, and other men prepared the refreshments.

## Common Goals

Everywhere, women want their children to be fed. They want their sons and brothers and fathers and husbands liberated from the burden of war. Everywhere women of color speak of the double oppression of sex and race. They call all of us to work toward wholeness and the end of oppression.

## The Decade in the United States

What about the United States? A national Decade committee has been formed, made up of representatives

in all 36 member churches of the World Council of Churches in the United States.

Headed by Mary Ann Lundy of the women's unit of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and Bishop Forrest Smith of the United Methodist Church, the Decade Committee in the United States is committed to work in concert with women and men around the globe, joining their struggle to ours in the U.S."

*For a summary of Evangelical-Lutheran Church in America efforts to be a church in solidarity with women, see "The Decade and the ELCA."*

Will the Decade take hold in the United States? Will any real change result from the activities of the Decade? Yes, if the churches take seriously the call to be in solidarity with age-old yearnings of women.

Women alone cannot make the Decade work, but women and men working in partnership may be able to bring down walls that still divide. It will not be easy. But oh, the result—and even the process—will be worth it. ■

## The Decade and the ELCA

The Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women is inspiring and encouraging efforts on behalf of women's spirituality, women in leadership and women in need throughout the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

○ Our Savior's Lutheran in the Los Angeles area kicked off their participation in the Decade with a special litany in a Mother's Day service.

○ Youth and pastors in the Missouri/Kansas Synod are wearing a red thread tied around their wrists to call attention to violence against women. The idea has caught on throughout Missouri with groups supporting women who have been battered.

*continued next page*





○ Christ the King Lutheran Church in downtown Chicago is joining Episcopalians and Methodists who volunteer to prepare a meal one night a month at a local shelter for homeless women.

○ A college student who is physically disabled became one of the first ELCA participants on an ecumenical computer network which enables people from many denominations and faith groups to share ideas and information about the Decade.

○ Women of the ELCA offer "Celebrating Women of Faith: A Program for the Ecumenical Decade" as one way to commemorate women's historic role in service to God, church and others. This program, designed as a dramatic reading with prayers of thanksgiving and hymns of praise interspersed throughout, lifts up such saints as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Sojourner Truth, Jane Addams; Mary Lyon, Elisabeth Fedde and Frances Willard. The program is available for sale from Augsburg Fortress (code 2-8940, \$1.50).

○ The ELCA hosted the first meeting of the Decade's United States Steering Committee, and the ELCA's Commission for Women convenes a large monthly idea-sharing meeting for churchwide staff. Many of the ideas generated from these meetings—computer networking, promotional buttons and slogans—have been adopted by other denominations.

## It's Not Too Late to Learn How to Participate:

○ Help distribute the latest ELCA and World Council of Churches information about the Decade—such as posters, bulletin inserts and background brochures. See the 1989-90 Women of the ELCA catalog or contact the ELCA Commission for Women.

○ Join the Decade conversations on one of the computer networks, called TCN and NWI, by using your home computer or one at your church or synod office. For help in joining these conversations contact Paul Milner, director for churchwide networking or Colin Kruger, manager for networking applications. Either can be reached by phone (800-638-3522) or through the networks. [To electronically contact Paul Milner, use NWI:PMILNER or TCN:TCN382.] [For Colin Kruger, use TCN:TCN3009.]

○ Share your ideas, stories, projects, efforts and questions about the Decade with the churchwide staff coordinating the ELCA's participation in the Decade, by contacting the Office for Leadership Empowerment, Commission for Women, ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631-4191.

*Diane Minor  
Commission for  
Communication*

# THE CHRISTMAS GIFT



Elisabet McHugh



**E**mily had no idea what made her go into the church in the first place. It wasn't even her church. She had come to town to look for a pair of warm gloves, but the long lines of Christmas shoppers at the checkout counters made her change her mind.

At first glance the church appeared to be empty. Not until she had made herself comfortable in one of the pews did Emily spot the tiny figure up front. A little girl.

Looking up at one of the stained-glass windows which depicted Jesus as the shepherd watching over his flock, Emily realized that it was years since she had been inside a church. Years. And she had no idea what she was doing here now.

It was nice to be able to sit down for a while. For some reason the holiday rush seemed to get worse every year. She, for one, would be glad when Christmas was over. It didn't have much meaning when she was alone.

This year her daughter Brenda and her husband were in Guam. Before that it had been Germany. Emily sighed. She had yet to see her youngest grandchild. How old would the baby be now? She must be going on two already.

Watching the child up front, Emily found herself wondering what the girl was doing there all by herself. She couldn't be more than eight years old, nine at the most. Shouldn't she be in school? Maybe she was waiting for her mother.

Resuming her train of thought, Emily now wondered whether she would even bother to put up any decorations this year. The older she got, the more trouble it seemed to be. At least she didn't have to buy presents for anyone. For the past few years



she had sent money instead. That way she didn't have to worry about what to get.

**N**ow the little girl was coming down the aisle. She was wearing jeans tucked into a pair of warm snow boots. Wisps of dark blond hair peeked out from under her white knitted hat. Her blue coat was bulging in the front.

Emily watched with mild curiosity as the girl slowed down and tugged at her coat zipper, gradually revealing a furry little head with short floppy ears and a pair of round bewildered eyes.

"Why," Emily said spontaneously, leaning forward, "it's a puppy!"

The girl had stopped. Now she said shyly, "His name is Smokey."

"Smokey," Emily repeated. "And what is your name, dear?"

"Jennifer. But everybody calls me Jenny." With some difficulty she extracted the dog from inside her coat. "Here," she said. "You want to hold him?"

The puppy was surprisingly heavy. Yet he was so small. Emily ended up placing him in the crook of her arm. It's just like holding a baby, she thought.

"He's not very old, is he?" Smiling, she gave his tummy a gentle rub. "Have you had him long?"

"Only since yesterday. I found him in a dumpster in the alley. He was buried under all the garbage. I guess somebody didn't want him so they threw him away."

Emily stared at her, shocked. "You found him in a dumpster?"

Jenny nodded, her eyes unnaturally bright. "Mom says we have to take him to the pound." She bit her lip to keep it from trembling.

"But . . ." Emily was at a loss for words. She looked down at the helpless bundle on her arm. "Can't you keep him?"

Jennifer shook her head. "Mrs. Santori doesn't like animals. She's our landlady." Holding out her hand, she allowed the puppy to chew on a finger.

"He's really a very good puppy," Jenny continued. "Doesn't even chew on stuff, or anything. He'll be no problem, I promise."

It took Emily a few moments to grasp the implication of the girl's words. "Are you saying you want me to take him?" Her voice was sharper than she had intended.

"I was waiting for you. That's why I didn't go to school today. I asked him to send someone who could give Smokey a good home."

Emily closed her eyes for a moment, trying her best to get things straight. "You said you asked . . . who did you ask?"



"God," Jenny said simply.  
God!

A strange feeling of inevitability engulfed Emily. Struggling to keep her voice steady, she repeated almost in a whisper. "You asked God . . . to send someone to take the puppy?"

Jenny continued matter-of-factly. "Mom and I couldn't find anyone who would take Smokey, so I thought if I came to church and prayed, God would send the right person." She added softly, "And he did."

**F**or the longest while Emily stared unseeingly into space. Her thoughts went to the house where she lived alone with two elderly cats for company. It was too far away from town, especially in winter, but it had been her home for over 30 years. Most of the farm land had been sold after her husband passed away, but she still had almost three acres left, and part of the backyard was fenced.

A perfect place for a dog.

Looking down at the puppy, who was fast asleep with his face buried in her coat, she felt very humble.

A child had asked in faith, believing that God would answer . . . and God had answered.

Straightening her shoulders, Emily took a deep breath and looked up at Jenny. Noticing the anxious expression on her face, she instinctively reached out and grasped her hand. Then she said, firmly, "I guess the best thing would be for you and your mother to bring Smokey over to my place this evening. I have some shopping to do first. He'll be needing food, you know, and some proper dishes. Maybe a nice basket with a cushion. And a collar. . . ." ■



*Elisabet McHugh, who spent her early years in Sweden, now calls Moscow, Idaho, home. The mother of six, McHugh is the author of five books for children and young adults.*

# WINNING at LOSING

**Thin is a four-letter word** that has put a curse on many people's lives today. But it doesn't have to be that way. You can feel at home in your own body by learning to change behavior, incorporate exercise, and make healthy food choices.

**Of course not everyone needs to lose weight.** Many of us reading this column maintain an appropriate weight, eat healthful foods, and feel good about ourselves. Let us rejoice that. God wants us to care for the bodies we've been given.

**For those of us who are rounder** than we'd like to be, who need help in paying attention to a healthy diet, or who may be experiencing some physical or emotional effects from being overweight, here are some thoughts and suggestions.

## SET REASONABLE GOALS

We can take control of our lives. One of the first steps is to set reasonable goals. We need to know where we are headed. Unrealistic expectations are often an obstacle to permanent weight loss. A slow, gradual weight loss of one to two pounds a week gives our bodies time to adjust. There will be setbacks, and we may not always be satisfied with how much we are losing. But we need to give ourselves credit for what we can do. Let's not blame ourselves for

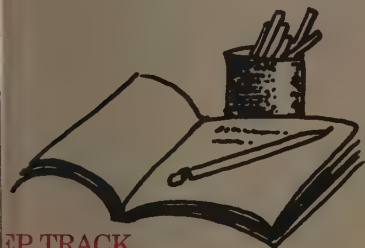
what we can't realistically accomplish.

To find out how long it should take to reach a goal, decide on your goal weight and calculate how many weeks it will take to reach the goal at a rate of a pound a week. Do the same calculations for losing two pounds a week. The time it should take to reach the goal will fall somewhere between these dates. We can be setting ourselves up for failure if we expect to reach our goal soon.

## EXERCISE REGULARLY

An important step is to make a long commitment to a regular exercise program. Studies show that in weight-loss programs which incorporate exercise, more fat and less muscle and water are lost. Besides helping us lose weight and body fat, exercise offers other benefits for the heart and lungs, and provides a general feeling of well-being.

The challenge is to find an exercise program we enjoy so we'll stick with it. To be healthy and fit, exercise isn't have to be painful or exhausting. It just has to be done.



## KEEP TRACK PROGRESS

When keeping track of progress, try to weigh only once a week. Not only will this allow fluid changes to even out, but it will give a more accurate reading, but it will also encourage a focus more on behaviors needed for change, and less on the scale.

Tracking body measurements every two to four weeks is another way to monitor body changes without weighing on the scale repeatedly. Don't forget to plan some nonfood rewards and celebrations for success. Give yourself something special for every five pounds of weight loss. It will help to keep up the enthusiasm and motivation.

## CHOOSE A NUTRITIOUS PROGRAM



Whether we choose to help ourselves through a commercial program, clinical setting, or through a book, a weight-loss program must be based on sound nutrition. Weight-loss and good nutrition are not incompatible.

Here are some nutrition tips:

- ◆ Keep a food diary for two weeks. It will be helpful in figuring calorie intake; it will also help you become more aware of food habits.

- ◆ Eat frequently and don't skip meals. A combination of *small* snacks and meals is best.

- ◆ Eat slowly, concentrating on taste, texture and smell. Try to take at least 20 minutes to complete a meal. That's the length of time the body needs to begin to feel "full."

- ◆ Occasionally allow a small portion of a "taboo" food. One chocolate chip cookie eaten at a restaurant, for example, may keep you out of the two dozen in the bag at home.

- ◆ Starving to make up for bingeing doesn't work. After a binge, get back on track as soon as possible.

- ◆ Keep a positive attitude. "I can eat what I want; now what do I really want to eat?"

- ◆ Replace food high in fat with lots of fresh fruits, vegetables, and grains. These foods are loaded with nutrition, tend to be lower in calories and create a feeling of fullness.

Our body burns more calories from metabolizing carbohydrates than it does from fats. Fat calories are readily stored as body fat, whereas carbohydrate calories have to be converted to fat in a process that uses calories. No more than 30 percent of the calories we consume should come from fat.





## THINK THINNER

The food we eat plays a major role in our ability to lose weight. But for permanent weight loss, our life-style must change. We will need to adjust our attitude about eating and will need to become a thinner person in our thinking.

The startling fact is that about 95 percent of the people who lose weight regain it within two years! Unless we develop new ways to manage food, we will quickly regain those lost pounds.

It is important to discover the connection between what we think and feel and how much we eat. For instance, certain attitudes seem to be more troublesome than others. Often people believe, falsely, that weight control is an all-or-nothing matter; that if a high-calorie food is eaten or an exercise session missed, the entire diet is ruined.

A visit to a medical doctor for a physical is always a good idea before starting a weight-loss program. If taking medication, a follow-up appointment after weight loss may be advisable to make any readjustments in dosage that may be needed.



## TAKE A BALANCED APPROACH

Try to think of a weight reduction plan as a three-legged stool. If we take away one of the legs, chances are we will lose our balance and fall. We can increase our chances for success by using a three-pronged approach.

- ◆ Choose a balanced, nutritional sound diet. Keep calorie intake around 1,200 calories.

- ◆ Stay on the move. Regular exercise will counteract your body's tendency to conserve calories.

- ◆ Change old behaviors. Find out when and why you eat. Then work to change poor eating patterns.

Sustaining weight control is possible, not by going on one diet after another, but by a lifelong commitment to good eating, regular exercise, and reshaping habits.

God wants us to care for the precious gift of our bodies. If in your current situation, you feel weight loss is a needed part of your stewardship, we commend the above steps to you. Here's to a renewed you! ■

# Miriam Johnson & Children's Stories

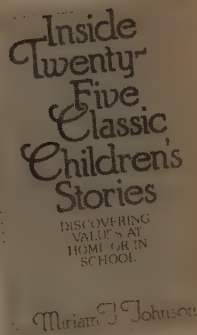
Kathleen Lull Seaton

As a parent and teacher, I am always looking for resources to enable me to help children wrestle with how faith fits into daily life. Parents, teachers, and other adults with like concerns will welcome author Miriam Johnson's two volumes, *Inside Twenty-Five Classic Children's Stories* and *Inside Twenty-Five More Classic Children's Stories*. Subtitled *Discovering Values at Home or in School*, the books provide lively descriptions of stories which, intentionally or unintentionally, contain themes of faith or valuing.

Along with classics from children's literature, Johnson's books introduce recent selections that are likely to become new favorites. The first volume includes books about creation, getting to know oneself, characteristics of God, God at work in the world, power versus truth, and life after death. Some of the titles examined in volume 1, for example, include *The Runaway Bunny* by Margaret Wise Brown, *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White and *Apartment Three* by Ezra Jack Keats. The stories in the second volume explore design in nature, redeeming situations, connecting with the church, and God's love in human settings. Among the stories discussed are *Yertle the Turtle* by Dr. Seuss, *Die and the Old One* by Miska Miles and *The Lying Boy* by Sid Fleischman.

The author provides thought-provoking discussions and conversation starters to help children and adults respond to the stories. Both volumes contain books for various ages and levels that are appropriate for use at home, at school, or in church-related settings.

As the daughter of a Lutheran pastor and an artist in Clarinda, Iowa, Miriam Johnson grew



More

DISCOVERING  
VALUES AT  
HOME OR IN  
SCHOOL

up surrounded by a community of faithful people. Among her early memories are happy afternoons spent reading. Later, at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, Johnson recalls "loving reading, writing, and English."

**C**ombining her love of reading and children, Johnson pursued an elementary teaching career in Connecticut while her husband, Paul Johnson, served several Lutheran congregations as pastor. With the arrival of children Philip and Paula, Johnson began to experiment with using books and stories to help her own youngsters think about faith in daily life.

In the 1970s, the Johnsons relocated to Philadelphia, where Miriam joined the staff of the Division of Parish Services of the Lutheran Church in America as an editor for early elementary resources. Drawing on her teaching career and studies at Boston College for a doctoral degree in curriculum, she helped develop the Living Faith curriculum, numerous vacation church school series, and materials for church libraries, small church schools, and summer Sunday school.

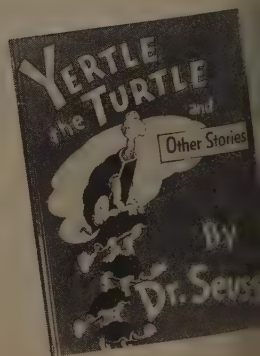
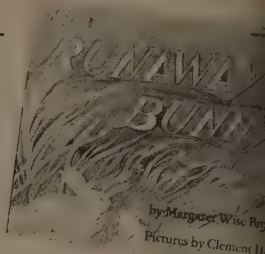
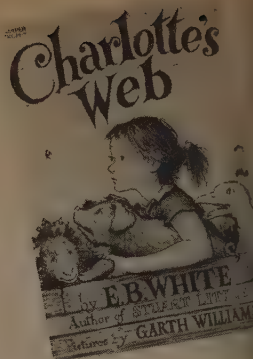
Working with editors, writers, and teachers in parishes, Johnson continued to hear the same pleas parents had shared with her. "How," they asked, "can we help children understand that faith and life fit together in meaningful ways?"

In response, Johnson created *Inside Twenty-Five Classic Children's Stories* and its sequel as resources for adults.

**W**hile books can be wonderful springboards to conversation, Johnson is clear about their primary purpose with children. "Children's books are, first and foremost, to be enjoyed."

When not at work as a reading specialist for the Brockton, Massachusetts, schools, Johnson can be found reading and enjoying books and cementing her relationship with grandson Seth. ■

*Kathleen Lull Seaton is the mother of four children and is director of Good Samaritan Episcopal Day School in Paoli, Pennsylvania. She has also served as an early childhood specialist for the Lutheran Church in America.*





# Inside *Frog and Toad Together*

*Frog and Toad Together*, a collection of five stories by Arnold Lobel (Harper and Row, 1972) is highlighted in Miriam Johnson's *Inside 25 More Classic Children's Stories*. (One of the five Frog and Toad stories, "The Garden," was reprinted in the March 1988 LWT.)

As with each of the stories Johnson uses, she begins by briefly summarizing the plot, then pointing to the theological or valuing themes implicit in the story. "The boundless nature of Frog's patience illustrates something of the Creator's patience toward us," writes Johnson of *Frog and Toad Together*. She also sees a connection between "The Garden" and 1 Corinthians 3:6-7.

Each discussion concludes with several "conversation starters" to lead to expanded thinking about the story. The conversation starters for *Frog and Toad Together* are: What is the glue that holds Frog and Toad's friendship together? What things that Frog says does Toad not hear? Are there any ways that we are like either Frog or Toad? How is Frog like God?

Two points are repeatedly stressed by Johnson. First, valuing themes and theological messages can be lifted from children's literature—whether or not such an interpretation was intended originally by its author. And second, children's literature is written primarily to be enjoyed. The conversation starters are not to be construed as "tests" or bases for drawn-out morality discussions.

The commentary and conversation starters provided by Johnson can, however, add new dimensions to the stories for both adults and children. And for those favorites, read over and over again, something new to think about and ponder is especially welcome.

SES

---

*Inside Twenty-five Classic Children's Stories* (Paulist Press, 1986, \$4.95) and *Inside Twenty-five More Classic Children's Stories* (Paulist Press, 1988, \$5.95), both by Miriam J. Johnson, are available through your local library or bookstore, or through your nearest Augsburg Fortress location.



# Meet Two “Companions on Your Journey”

Cynthia J. Mickelson

*Companions on Your Journey: Studies of Biblical Women* is a 12-session study highlighting women of the Bible who were instruments of God as they revealed and experienced God's steadfast love. But who will our companions be, and where will our Bible study journey take us? Phyllis Kersten and Louise Williams, writers of the 1990 study, help us find the an-



Louise Williams



Phyllis Kersten

swers to these questions, as they lead us down roads traveled by Ruth and Naomi, by women in the early Christian community and by Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Phyllis and Louise radiate an inspired energy. Both have spent their lives working with women and congregations, and they bring experience, insight and inspiration to *Companions*.

Phyllis Kersten was born in Detroit, the youngest of seven children and the only girl. She attended Valparaiso University in Valparaiso, Indiana, where she majored in English.

Today Phyllis serves as vice president for communications for the Wheat Ridge Foundation in Chicago. Known as the “Lutheran Christmas Seals people,” Wheat Ridge provides seed money that annually helps start some 60 new ministries in health and social service. Many of Phyllis's projects at Wheat Ridge relate directly to women, such as the Turning Point Women's Center in San Jose, California; housing, counseling and job training for displaced homeless women and their children; and programs to strengthen family life.

Kersten is president of her congregation.

ion, Ascension Lutheran Church, Riverside, Illinois. She has written prayer day service for women, men's, youth programs, devotions and numerous articles for church periodicals. Phyllis and Louise previously coauthored *Talented, Tired, Beautiful Feet*, a women's Bible study published in 1986.

Louise Williams grew up on a farm in Missouri and likes the quiet of a country setting. She attended seminary to become a deaconess and now finds herself there again, as the executive director of the Lutheran Deaconess Association. The association provides education for men who want to become deaconesses, support for graduated deaconesses, and programs for lay people dedicated to Christian service, such as gatherings for mothers of young children.

Louise is the author of an 11-part series on spirituality currently running in *The Lutheran*. She writes in the August 9 issue, "... God keeps saying 'I love you' over and over trying to find ways and languages people can understand." Louise brings the same insight to *Companions*, that our journey together through the study might enable us to more fully hear God's "I love you."

The four resources that make up the study are:

**Five study sessions**, found in each 90 issue of LWT (and only in LWT).

**Leader guide**, which contains step-by-step information to help a leader facilitate the study. Some questions have specific answers provided; others give helps for responding to reflective questions. Tips are included to help move the group along.

**A Bible study resource book.** This book, designed for all participants, is a personal tool for study, prayer and reflection. It can be for personal use and/or group meetings. The book's format is new: it's full of reflections, poetry, and additional commentary meant to enrich and add greater dimension to the study. The writers recommend that participants keep a personal journal of reflections as well.

**An audiocassette.\*** This is an exciting new supplementary resource. One side of the tape contains two-minute stories, one per session, relating to the theme of the session. They are slice-of-life anecdotes that are recorded by women from various backgrounds and cultures.

On the flip side of the tape are three ten-minute guided reflections on the themes of the three sections of the study: a reflection on journeys, a reflection on gifts, and a reflection on the Christmas story.

While supplementary resources may be ordered separately, the study material for *Companions on Your Journey* is available only in *Lutheran Woman Today*.

To subscribe to LWT, contact your congregational group coordinator or use the individual order form found on the inside back cover. To start a group subscription, write LWT Circulation, 426 South Fifth St., Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440, or call 1-800-328-4648, ext. 347. All subscriptions are payable in advance.

*continued on next page*

\*Not to be confused with resources for persons with visual disabilities. See the box on p. 26. For further information about such resources, call the ELCA Braille and Tape Service, 1-800-328-4648, extension 502.



## ORDERING INFORMATION

**LEADER GUIDE :** (order one per leader).

Price \$2.85. Code 2-9026.

**BIBLE STUDY RESOURCE BOOK:**

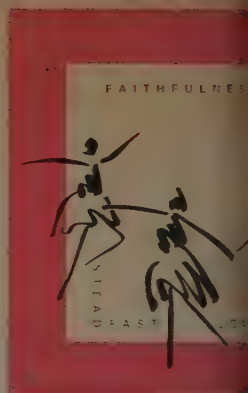
(order as individuals desire).

Price \$3.50. Code 2-9025.

**AUDIOCASSETTE:** (order as individuals desire).

Price: \$8.98. Code 2-9090.

Order from your nearest Augsburg Fortress location, through the 1989-90 Women of the ELCA Catalog, or by calling 800-328-4648. Postage and handling is extra.



For information or advance planning, the titles and biblical texts for *Companions on Your Journey: Studies of Biblical Women* are listed below. Note that the combined July/August issue of LWT will feature two sessions of the study.

### PART 1

(Sessions 1-4)

#### JOURNEYING FROM BETHLEHEM TO BETHLEHEM

JANUARY: Companions in Need  
Study text: Ruth 1:1-5

FEBRUARY: Companions Indeed  
Study text: Ruth 1:6-22

MARCH: Bread for the Journey  
Study text: Ruth 2

APRIL: Extending the Family  
Circle  
Study text: Ruth 4:13-22

### PART 2

(Sessions 5-8)

#### GIFTS FOR THE JOURNEY: FROM JERUSALEM TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

MAY: A Long List of Companions  
Study text: Romans 16:1-16

JUNE: Compatible Companions  
Study text: Acts 18:1-3,  
18-19, 25-26; Romans 16:3;  
1 Corinthians 16:19

JULY/AUGUST: Companions of  
One Cloth  
Study text: Acts 9:36-43;  
16:11-15, 40

JULY/AUGUST: Companions in  
Waiting  
Study text: Acts 1:12-14;  
12:12-17; 21:9

### PART 3

(Sessions 9-12)

#### BETHLEHEM REVISITED

SEPTEMBER: Mary—God's  
Companion and  
Ours  
Study text: Luke 1:26-38

OCTOBER: Kindred Spirits  
Study text: Luke 1:39-45, 56

NOVEMBER: Joined in Song  
Study text: Luke 1:46-55

DECEMBER: A Journey of the  
Heart  
Study text: Luke 2:1-20

# LETTERS

## Thankoffering Service

Thankoffering service (September 1989) is a good, inspirational service of thanksgiving and praise to God. However, is it proper to say "recite the Apostles' Creed" or "recite the Lord's Prayer"?

Inez Rue

Bowman, North Dakota

...instructions might better have been to confess the Apostles' Creed and recite the Lord's Prayer.—ED.

...circle meets every Tuesday morning. We use LWT for our discussions, having the Bible study each week and taking turns reading articles on other weeks. Last week we followed "A Thankoffering Service." We all enjoyed participating in the service and wonder if this type of service could be included in each issue?

Marjorie H. Wall

Chalmette, Louisiana

Thankoffering service will be featured every September in LWT. Thankofferings are remitted to the Chicago office in support of churchwide Women of the ELCA efforts. Beginning in 1990, each issue will contain at least two meditations for individual or group use, including a new department called "Cover Meditation."—ED.

Please send comments to Letters, Lutheran Woman Today, 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Chicago, IL 60631.

## Call for nominations to Women of the ELCA churchwide board


Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is calling for suggested nominees for members to serve on its churchwide board. An official letter requesting such nominees, with information on the nomination process, has gone out to every congregational unit of Women of the ELCA.


Congregational and intercongregational units may submit the names of suggested nominees, as can delegates to the First Triennial Convention and officers and members of the present churchwide board. Current members of the churchwide board may be re-elected, but they must be nominated again. A nominating committee will select final nominees. Election is to take place at the First Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA at Anaheim, California, July 12-15, 1990. Check with your unit president for details about the nominations process. Think about whom your unit would like to nominate. Suggestions for nominees, on the appropriate form, must be postmarked no later than December 20, 1989.

# Discovering Gifts

*Neglect not the gift that is in thee. . . (1 Timothy 4:14)*


When our family gathered around our Christmas tree  bursting with brightly wrapped gifts and sparkling decorations, Mama always sat in her favorite wide-armed leather chair by the French doors. Here she had a vantage point for watching the children scrambling around the tree during the last activity of the evening.


It was her Christmas custom to give each of the small grandchildren a five-dollar bill. Sometimes  she tucked these bills into little silk bags that she had made. Sometimes the bills were twined around the clappers of miniature hand-painted bells. Whatever the containers, the gifts were always well hidden.

The wide-eyed children loved the treasure hunt. They dug under the embroidered tree skirt, rummaged through discarded gift wrappings, and looked high and low among the tree branches. They never stopped, and they never lost faith that each 


gift would be found.

When the hunt was over, each child with a smile of assurance proudly displayed his or her gift.

 Then Mama, pushing back her perfectly coiffed hair, would smile and say,

"Remember, hidden gifts have to be looked for. It's good for you to know that some offerings have to be paid attention to—like God's gifts." 

My mother took the opportunity at a time when hearts are open and receptive to teach her family, children and grown-ups alike, that spiritual gifts, like her presents, are sometimes vague to us. However, the gifts God gives us can be found if we search with faith, explore with hope, and pursue with steadfastness.

*Dear God, help me, I pray,  
to discover and use your gifts  
to me, even though at times  
they may seem elusive.* ■ 

Faye Field is a free-lance writer from Longview, Texas.

## Editor

Nancy J. Stelling

## Associate Editor

Sue Edison-Swift

## Editorial Secretary

Cynthia J. Mickelson

## Production Editor

Ann Harrington

## Graphic Design

Lilja Baehr Design

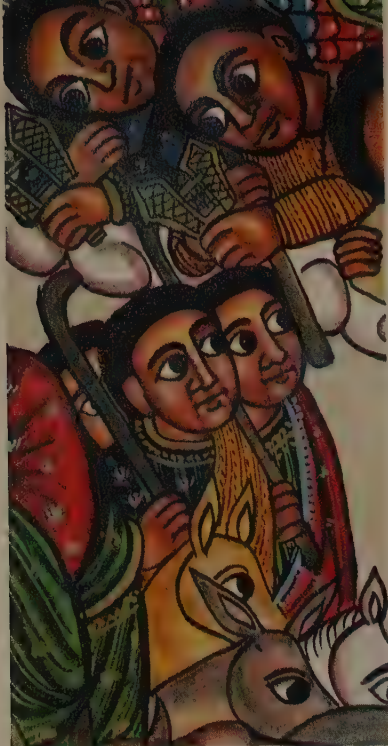
## On the front and back covers

The painting on skin parchment by Ethiopian artist Zelel Iwuneta is reprinted from *Christmas: The Annual of Christmas Literature and Art*, Volume 57 (Augsburg, 1987).

Art and photos: Tom Boll, 1, 11, 44; Camerique, 2; Sharon Somers, 4, 5; Meg Bussey, 19; Lilja Baehr Design, 21-26, 29, 39, 40, 43, 48; Peter Lindman, 31; Cleo Photography, 32; Sue Edison-Swift, 35, 37.







## Wholeness of the Church

This community of  
women shall work  
toward wholeness  
of the church.

Constitution and Bylaws,  
Women of the ELCA

#58DAXXXXXXXXXX 3-DIGIT 947  
#90DD2484217# SRP COMP Lx  
GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL  
UNION LIBRARY  
2451 RIDGE  
BERKELEY  
CA 94709  
7284









